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LENS 2: *Stargirl*

Children's Literature

2/19/13

*Critical*

*Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli is a text depicting society. The main question that kept arising throughout the book for me was, “What is normal?” In the beginning of the story, Stargirl is an unknown. The school even questions her existence. “She's not real... She's not real...” was the common mantra. How could someone so strange exist in their black and white world? She wasn't normal to the school's standards, but that didn't stop the school from slowly accepting her. They accepted her so much that they wanted to be her. She was original, different, like a breath of fresh air. The school wanted a piece of that. Soon, they were celebrating her uniqueness. This is our society in a nutshell.

In *The Pleasures of Children's Literature* the authors state, “Ideologies persuade people of their obviousness by convincing them that they are indeed the people who believe the things the ideologies want them to believe – that they are, in fact, certain kinds of individuals...the most significant effort of ideology is that it provides people with their sense of who and what they are.” Half the time we're supposed to conform; we are to look a certain way, act a certain way, and if we don't, we're wrong. But the other half of the time, we appreciate differences – in music, art, etc. It's a double standard, and that's why our view of normal is off. The reason why Stargirl was such a strong character in regards to this is because despite the backlash or praise from her peers, it didn't faze her. She still continued her actions. Stargirl's actions, when backed up by reasons, made sense. She changed her name to fit herself; our name *is* a representation of who we are. She cheered for both sides at sporting events because she didn't believe in competition over the feelings of others. Eventually, the school turned on her because they couldn't understand her actions. They believed everything she did had a hidden agenda. Even when she abandoned Stargirl and became Susan again, when the school continued to shun her, she went back to her old ways. She didn't see the appeal of conforming, not when either way – being one of them or being Stargirl – wouldn't change her peer's negative views on her.

The message that readers should take from this text is to be an individual. Society will judge either way, so why not do what brings the most joy? In the text, the quote by Archie, “[Stargirl] is one of us. Most decidedly. She is us more than we are us. She is, I think, who we really are. Or were,” represents the idea that forming to society doesn't make us normal, that our society is just afraid of going against the norm. It helps to be accepted, but why mold ourselves to a society that's easily re-molded. Individuality should be praised, not scrutinized.